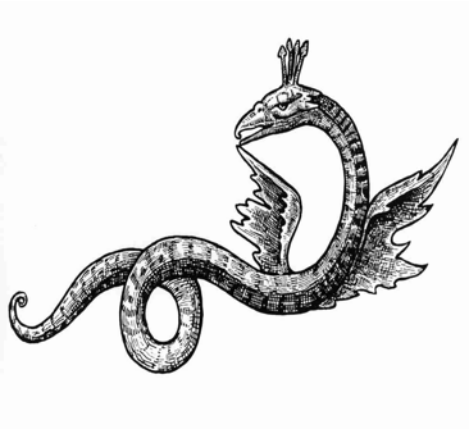
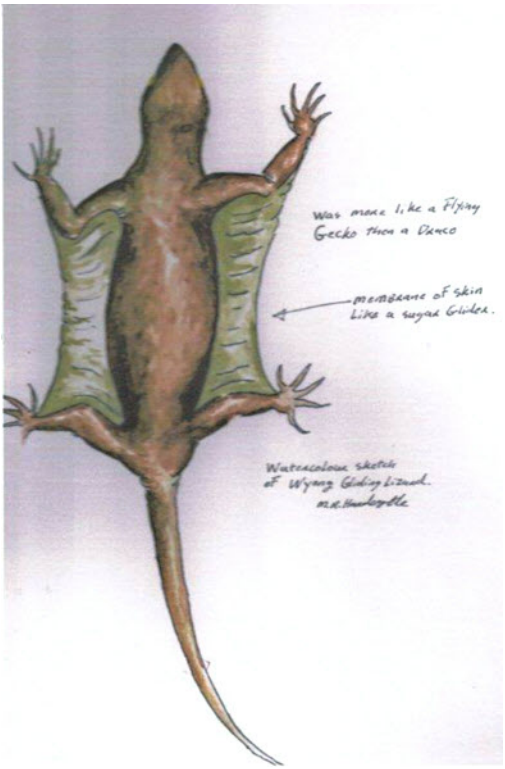
Flying Snake

A Journal of Cryptozoology, Folklore and Forteana

Volume 1 Issue 1 **April 2011** **£3**





In This Issue: Pink-Tusked Elephants in Tang Dynasty China •A Wild Cat in Dorset •Giant Centipedes of Hong Kong• •An Odd-Coloured Badger in Derbyshire, UK • And More!

ABOUT FLYING SNAKE

Flying Snake can be bought from:

Flying Snake Press,
112 High St,
Macclesfield,
Cheshire,
SK11 7QQ
UK

Tel: 01625 869048

http://homepage.ntlworld.com/richmuirhead/cryptozoology/

My initial plan is to publish 3 issues of Flying Snake a year. Please feel free to contact me if you want to reproduce anything I have written. If you want to reproduce other authors' works, I will try and contact them on your behalf and get back to you. The opinions of authors other than myself do not necessarily reflect my own.

Back issues available on request.

I hope to publish PDF versions of Flying Snake as soon as I get a chance to learn how to use the technology.

PAYMENT

Subscriptions: £ 3 per issue, £ 9 per annum.

Payment for however many issues you (and your friendly neighbourhood, reading, flying, snake) would like to purchase can be made by means of PayPal on my web site (See url above).

Cheques and postal orders from within the United Kingdom should be made out to Richard Muirhead, please, and *not* Flying Snake or Flying Snake Press.

Cheques will not be accepted from outside of the U.K at this point in time.

CREDITS

Flying Snake Title/logo: William Frederiksen

Flying Snake image on front cover: Janet Bord and the *Fortean Picture Library*.Flying lizard illustration on front cover,Mike Hardcastle.

CONTENTS

Dr. Devo's Diary 4

The Curious Creature Chad Arment 5-6

Are there Unknown Species of Flying Lizards in Australia? Richard Muirhead and Mike Hardcastle 7-15

Apparitions in the Air, Cheshire, 1651 16- 17

Ezekiel's Wheels GOD (aka The Ancient of Days) and Richard Muirhead 18-19

Flying Snakes Part 1 Dale Drinnon 20-23

The Giant Centipedes of Hong Kong Mike Hardcastle and Richard Muirhead 24-30

The South Shields Devil Crabs Mike Hallowell 31-33

The Pink-Tusked Elephants of Tang Dynasty China Richard Muirhead 34-37

The Israeli Mermaid Zvi Ron 38-41

A Wildcat from Shaftesbury, Dorset Andy Scott 42-43

A Spotted Cat from a 15th Century Hunting Manual Marco Masseti

Zebro - an Equine Mystery from Iberia Karl Shuker 46-47 44-45

The Zebra-Drawn Carriage Richard Muirhead 48-49

Two Notes on the Nandi Bear Richard Muirhead 50-54

Notes and Queries 55-56

Book Reviews 57-59

Letters 60-65

DR DEVOS DIARY

"For I pray God for the introduction of new creatures into this island. For I pray God for the ostriches of Salisbury Plain, the beavers of the Medway and silver fish of Thames." Christopher Smart, ` Rejoice in the Lamb`. Poet, naturalist,lunatic (1722-1771)

Hello and welcome to Flying Snake issue 1. In case you are unfamiliar with my alter ego `Dr Devo', he only exists as a by-product of my relentless listening experience of Devo since about 1982. The nearest thing they have come to being exponents of cryptozoology or Fortean zoology is the song `Pink Pussycat` – as far as I know! But hey, if a green kitten can turn up in Denmark in 1995 then I guess anything is possible. In the book review section I look at the weird anthropology of `In The Beginning Was the End` by the equally weirdly named Oscar Kiss Maerth. This book title featured in Devo`s song `Gates of Steel`. I also review the 3 volume `Moa Sightings` by Bruce Spittle.

Devo are basically a concept band, de-evolution being the belief that humans are de-evolving into apes, if not literally then morally. However, I digress massively, this is a magazine about cryptozoology, Forteana and folklore, not de-evolution! It is also deliberately "archive" (which I designate as pre-1950) orientated because I am interested in cryptozoology before "cryptozoology" was coined as a word by Ivan T. Sanderson in the early 1940s or Bernard Heuvelmans in the 1950s depending on your perspective. I am sure that this "antique cryptozoology" will throw up some classics; in fact it already has. Indeed my first foray into writing about cryptozoology featured an event which may have predated 1942 by many years, though the Namibian Flying Snake of 1942 at Kirris West was the incident I was concerned with in the mid 1990s, (see CFZ Yearbook 1996). Hence `Flying Snake` as the title of this magazine.

So, without further ado, read on! Comments,letters and criticisms to flyingsnakepress@hotmail.co.uk

Issue 1 of Flying Snake is dedicated to my mother Sheila Muirhead . Thanks to everyone involved in contributing and helping produce Issue 1.Thanks to Janet Bord of the Fortean Picture Library for permission to reproduce the image of the flying snake on the front cover.Thanks to Mike Hallowell, William Frederiksen, Helena Roberts and Nic Moran for help with production.

The Curious Creature

By Chad Arment

The following story was given to me as a transcribed report from the original newspaper article by veteran researcher Gary Mangiacopra. It is a good example of the sometimes strange nature of old newspaper stories.

"Nobody Knows Its Name—a curious creature found in the mountains of New Mexico

"Arthur Jilson and Al Quinn, of Las Vegas, N.M., have purchased the curious quadruped recently captured in the mountains between Albuquerque and San Pedro, and it is now on exhibition there. The animal was found in company with another of the same kind, but larger, which was supposed to be the mother of the one caught, but which doubtless was a male of the same species, as the captured one gave unmistakable evidence of being several years old.

"The pair were vigorously pursued and the larger one succeeded in making it's escape. the creature did not thrive in captivity and soon died. The body was vent to P. J. Martin, the Las Vegas taxidermist, who has mounted it in a very lifelike way, the position being that often assumed by a cow when lying down, the two hind legs under the body, the right fore leg doubled under the left fore leg extending to the front at full length, the head and neck lifted in the air and the ears bent forward as if listening.

"The animal, as described by the *Optic*. is something like sixteen inches high by twenty-four inches long, and has the appearance of being an inch or two higher in the hips than in the withers. Its hide is entirely hairless, and while the general color is a kind of purplish black, most of the belly, the front part of one side, one fore leg and a blotch on the other side are of a delicate fawn color, mottled with black spots.

"The lower portion of all the legs, from the knee down, is yellow, and the upper part of each leg, except the one already mentioned, is black. The tail is about three inches long and is quite small; the body has the general appearance of the cow; but is rather more slender and elongated: the legs are like a deer's with cleft hoofs; the head, neck, eyes and ears are those of a hairless Mexican dog, though somewhat larger, and with the additional exception that in the upper part of the forehead are two small, backward-curving horns, looking like those of a young goat.

"Altogether, the creature is very peculiar and no territorial naturalist has been able to decide whether it is a freak of nature, a cross between several animals or whether it belongs to some heretofore unknown species.

When open for mounting its teeth were found ground down pretty evenly with the gums, while the stomach was filled with grass. The animal will be sent to the world's fair with the exhibit from this county. Chicago *Herald.* (From the New Haven, Connecticut, *Evening Register.* September 6. 1892.)"

Researchers need to be very careful about accepting such accounts at face value. First, we know that"filler" articles were sometimes created when there were empty columns. Nature faker or wonder stories were not uncommon, as they entertained the reader with ideas of unknown phenomena beyond the recognised boundaries of civilization.
Even detailed measurements given do not necessarily argue for veracity, as some journalists who contributed tall tales recognised the value of creative details.

Still, an argument that a story could be a hoax is not an argument that a story must be a hoax, at least not without corroborating evidence. One strong argument against this being an impetuous newsman's fabrication is that at least one of the Las Vegas, NM, men mentioned, Arthur Jilson. was noted in a number of local news items during the 1890s as a sportsman (both hunting and horses).

Another possibility is that the animal was created for exhibition purposes.

Without knowing more about the backstory (and a general search hasn't come up with any further details on the specimen), it is difficult to say for certain that the animal was not some sort of taxidermy hoax. We know that exhibitors would sometimes create elaborate stories about where and how an animal was found, when the actual story (and actual animal) were much more mundane. If we start from the assumption that this could in fact have been a real animal, and the story was also reasonably accurate, it sounds fairly goatlike rather than deerlike. There is a (rare) hairless mutation that can crop up in domestic goats. The described size, however, is rather odd, and a small goat kid wouldn't have distinctively curved horns. (Suggesting a hairless pygmy goat seems an unnecessary complication, particularly as pygmy goats are an African breed unknown in North America at the time).

So. 1 really can't offer a likely explanation from known species. I've also not run across any similar reports, so this may just be another dead end in historical cryptozoological research. unless further details can be uncovered. The story does bring up two things to keep in mind regarding cryptozoology.

First, this is one of the few mystery ungulates in North America. Other cryptids tend to get better coverage, but there are some interesting cases of grazing mystery animals.

Second, there are still many more mystery animal sightings yet to uncover in historical archives. There arc certainly many more newspapers yet to be made accessible. Patterns in historical newspapers are of interest to cryptozoology whether they reflect folkloric motifs or real encounters with unknown species.

Are There Unknown Species of Flying Lizards Living in Australia?

By Mike Hardcastle and Richard Muirhead

In November 2010 I came into contact with Mike Hardcastle of Wyong, New South Wales who passed on his father`s notes concerning the latter`s sighting of (along side his brother) a lizard(see front cover image by Mark Hardcastle) which was neither the native frilled lizard, nor Draco volans of Indonesia and Malaysia. In this report we summarize this 1952 sighting and other anomalous flying lizard sightings elsewhere in Australia.

Wikipedia has this to say about Draco volans:

> *Draco volans, or the Flying Dragon, is a member of the genus of gliding lizards Draco. It can spread out folds of skin attached to its movable ribs to form "wings" that it uses to glide from tree to tree over distances upwards of 8 meters (25 feet); however, like all modern reptiles, it lacks the ability to sustain powered flight, and is capable only of gliding. Its wings are brightly colored with orange, red and blue spots and stripes, and they provide camouflage when folded. The flying dragon can reach lengths as long as 19 - 23 cm. It feeds on arboreal ants and termites (1)*

Here are the hand-written notes of Mr Richard Hardcastle dating from 1990 and late 2010. See also Fig 2 below.

> *Vicinity – Wyong district – Warnervale.*
>
> *Time – Late 1940s*
>
> *Information – From district timber cutters.*

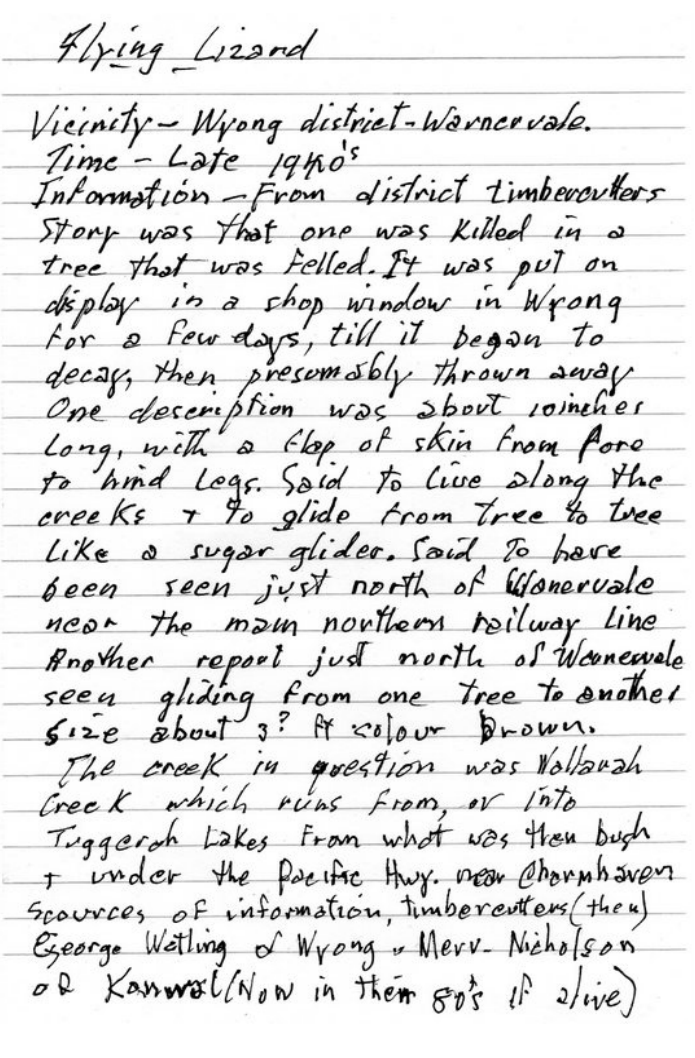
"Story was that one was killed in a tree that was felled. It was put on display in a shop window in Wyong for a few days, till it began to decay, then presumably thrown away. One description was about 10 inches long, with a flap of skin from fore to hind legs. Said to live along the creeks and glide from tree to tree like a sugar glider .Said to have been seen just north of Warnervale near the northern main railway line. Another report just north of Warnervale seen gliding from one tree to another size about 3 ft (?) colour brown. The creek in question was Wallarah Creek which runs from, or into Tuggerah Lakes from what was then bush and under the Pacific Highway near Charmhaven.

Sources of information, timber cutters (then) George Watling of Wyong and Merv Nicholson of Kanwal (now in their 80s if alive)

Olive green colour with a membrane of skin from front to hind legs. Skimmed from tree to tree .Found on Wallarah Creek…..(Wyong, Tuggerah Lakes area) Found by timber cutters in the 1950s. Was displayed in a shop window in Wyong for a few days Found between Warnervale and Wyee on the lake side of the northern railway line." (2)

Fig 1 Richard Hardcastle with the skin of a large, grey kangaroo.

Reproduced with permission of Richard Hardcastle



Flying Lizard

Vicinity – Wyong district - Warnervale.
Time – Late 1920's
Information – From district timbercutters
Story was that one was killed in a tree that was felled. It was put on display in a shop window in Wyong for a few days, till it began to decay, then presumably thrown away
One description was about 10 inches long, with a flap of skin from fore to hind legs. Said to live along the creeks & to glide from tree to tree like a sugar glider. Said to have been seen just north of Warnervale near the main northern railway line
Another report just north of Warnervale seen gliding from one tree to another
Size about 3? ft colour brown.
The creek in question was Wallarah Creek which runs from, or into Tuggerah Lakes From what was then bush & under the Pacific Hwy. near Charmhaven
Sources of information, timbercutters (then)
George Watling of Wyong & Merv. Nicholson of Kanwal (Now in their 80's if alive)

Fig 2 The handwritten notes of Mr. Richard Hardcastle

There is another account of this flying lizard in Rex Gilroy`s `Out of The Dreamtime`:

A strange half - bird,half- reptile creature was known to the aborigines of the Murray River country. A large creature, it was said in one myth, to have entered a village in search of its baby which the child of one of the tribespeople had stolen. In the course of its search it killed two men. The myth of the half-bird, half-reptile creature was given publicity in a 1927 newspaper article, which even gave a supposed sighting of the beast by a European. The nearest creature this `bird` can be compared to is the Pterodactyl……In 1952 a Mr R.Hardcastle was cutting timber for a living at Warnervale near Wyong, on

the New South Wales Central Coast. Thirty years later,in 1982,he related to me the following story:

“ Some of the timber men I knew told me about “ a flying lizard”. They said they had seen them up in the forest country hereabouts over the year…….[hereafter the account is very similar to the hand written notes quoted from above-R] Many of these flying lizards inhabited the tall trees near the creeks. My brother phoned reptile people at the Australian Museum in Sydney but they said there was no such species.!”(3)

The images below (Figs 3 and 4) from Google Earth show Wyong and Wallarah Creek where flying lizards have been spotted.

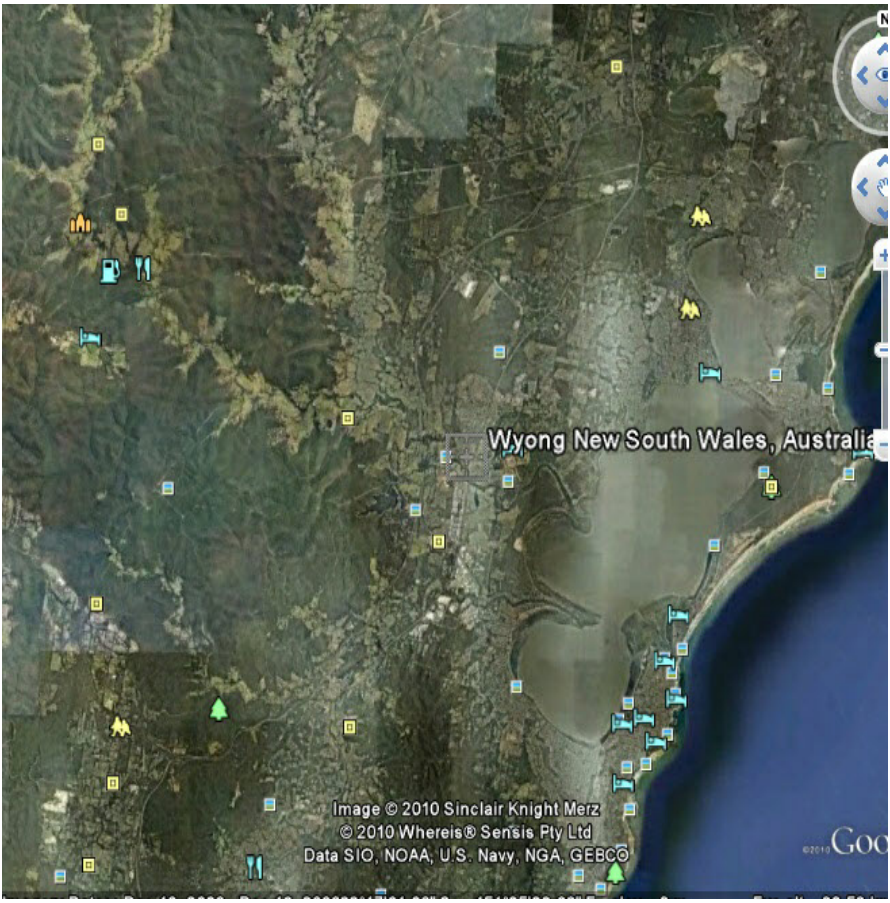

Wyong New South Wales, Australia
Image © 2010 Sinclair Knight Merz
© 2010 Whereis® Sensis Pty Ltd
Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO

Fig 3 Google Earth image of Wyong area

There are reports of Draco volans-like lizards in Queensland and islands in the Torres Straight. For example, in the Pennsylvania Bristol Bucks County Gazette of June 20th 1895:

Flying Snakes of the Antipodes The race of flying dragons, which spread such dismay and terror in olden times, is not yet entirely extinct, if we are to believe the utterances in a late Queensland paper. The Queensland Mercury says: " James Bass of the sandy flat lying beyond the Blue hill, near the head waters of Carns` creek, has brought another specimen flying serpent to this office. It is somewhat smaller than the one exhibited by him at Gulley last year and

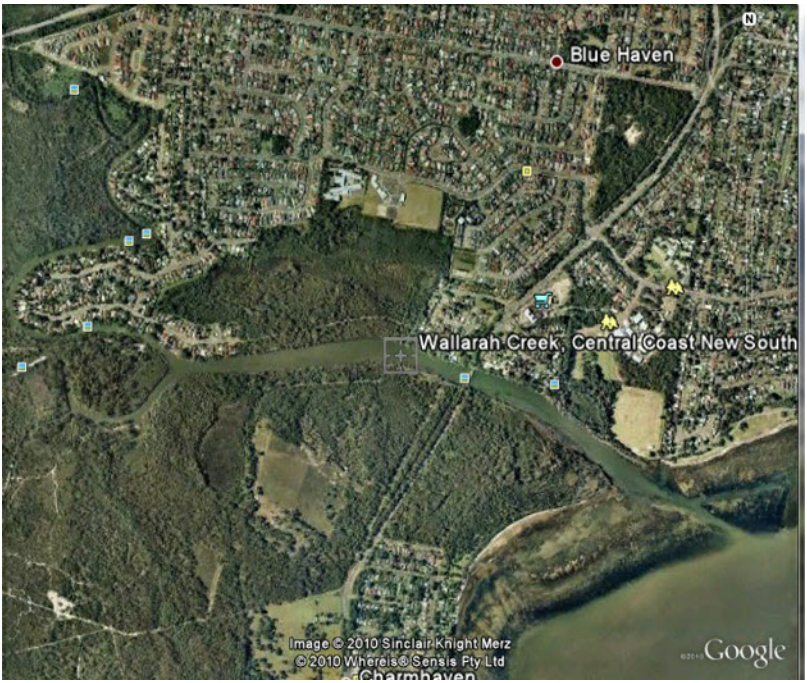


Fig 4 Google Earth Image of Wallarah Creek

larger than the one which he presented us on Christmas day. Like the other two, it has four three jointed legs, each 7 inches long. Between these legs, which are situated two on each side of the body, is a leathery membrane, much resembling a bat`s wing. Mr Bass declares that he has often seen them flying across Carns` creek at places where it is 60 feet wide." St. Louis Republic. (4)

On April 11th 1935 The Queenslander reported:

Flying Lizards by "WAYFARER"

Australia is rich in lizards,several hundreds of species being found throughout the Commonwealth,but it is not generally known that Australia has a flying lizard. This queer creature is not found on the mainland,but on certain of the islands in Torres Straits. The reptile is fairly plentiful on Moa Island, which is situated about 80 miles north-west of Cape York. The lizard is of a slaty colour, and it is remarkably like the common goanna in appearance; the differerence, however,is that it has "wings."These "wings" are simply pieces of strong but transparent skin stretched between the fore and hind legs. These "wings" do not enable the lizard to actually fly, but by means of them it is able to volpane to the ground from trees, after the manner of the flying squirrels. Because of this habit the lizard is greatly feared by the natives, for their have been dozens of cases where the lizards have accidentally struck natives when gliding to the ground. The reptiles have sharp claws and many of the natives so struck have been badly cut and scratched by the lizard`s claws.- "WAYFARER."(5)

On 16th September 1939, The Courier-Mail (Brisbane) reported:

"Flying Dragon" Sought

On a five week tour of investigatory and collection among islands off the north Arnhem Land coast, the Melbourne naturalist, Mr Charles Barrett, who for many years edited nature publications for the Melbourne Herald and Sun,left Darwin to-day in the Methodist mission`s motor vessel Larrpan.

Accompanied by his wife,also a naturalist,he will make a 120 mile trip,in the course of which he will visit the remote Weesel Islands. They will be the first naturalists ever to set foot on them.

Mr Barrett will endeavour to obtain a specimen of the flying dragon, a volplaning lizard believed to inhabit islands off the coast. (6)

Dale Drinnon has commented:

I mentioned Flying geckos to you last week in connection to some New World reports;however,I have heard independent mention of Flying lizards in Northern Australia(that spiky part that goes up towards New Guinea). If they are in novel areas they could be cryptids, more possibility of Flying geckos from Indonesia being released in Australia than in New World. (7)

The Argus, a Melbourne paper of July 25th 1911 reported a flying lizard type animal, though with Ropen-like characteristics from Warracknabeal, Victoria;

IN THE OPEN AIR

FLYING LIZARDS

A Warracknabeal boy sends a paragraph from the local "Herald" and asks if flying lizards are known anywhere. "Mr. T.W.Bochim on Sunday saw what he believed to have been a flying lizard. It was about a yard in length, of a greyish colour, whose head was very large. The strange visitor flew about 8ft above the ground.It crossed the yard of Mr Sims`s residence, flew across Mr Bochim`s property, and was lost sight of in Mr Taylor`s yard. There is no definite knowledge as to whether flying lizards have previously been seen in the neighbourhood, and some information on the point would be interesting."

I can`t suggest what this strange creature may be. There are no flying lizards in Australia. I have seen them in Java. They are beautifully coloured, but the largest not more than 8in or 10in in length, and live in the tree-tops. (8)

Two weeks later the same paper reported the following:

IN THE OPEN AIR

FLYING LIZARDS

Concerning the mystery of a flying lizard or some other strange creature at Warracknabeal, A.W Smith writes from that town "Some time before Mr Boehm`s note on this matter, when coming home from work, one bright moonlit night , I was attracted by a rustling

sound in a yard close by. On looking over I saw some dark but not clearly distinguishable object scaling a palling fence opposite. It went up quickly, with a distinct scratching noise on the pailings, that sound being quickly followed on the other side by a rapid whirr of apparently short wings, such a noise as a quail makes on rising. I mentioned the matter to several friends next day,but no one could account for it". (9)

Dr K.P.N.Shuker has noted a report of a volpaning frilled lizard from Queensland ;

Volpaning Frilled Lizard

Not long after the publication of this book`s original edition, I learnt of an additional, equally controversial glider – none other than Australia`s famous frilled lizard Chlamydosarus kingii. As already described and depicted in Chapter 2 of this present book, it is renonowned for the extraordinary crenated frill around its head and neck, which it expands if threatened, in order to startle and ward off any would-be attacker. However, some writers contend that it also utilizes its frill for volplaning, enabling it to glide from tree to tree.

In his book Bunyips and Billabongs (1933), Australians scientist Dr Charles Fenner included a remarkable statement made by Queensland naturalist Mrs Adam Black concerning this distinctive reptile:

…… a pair lived outside our garden fence for years. They would run up a tree if one approached, and I`ve often seen my husband put his hand round the tree (they always climb up the opposite side to where you are) and catch one`s tail; he would then hold it and go round and stroke the lizard`s back and frill. If really alarmed when up a tree they extend their gaily-coloured frill and glide down to root of another tree.

Sadly, Black gave no description of the volpaning itself. I can only assume that if it does occur, the frill must act like a parachute, opening out, thence enabling the lizard to drift passively downwards.

Summing up, Fenner stated:

I believe that Mrs Black and other observers have produced convincing evidence that we have an Australian "flying lizard."It is to be hoped that some zoologist will take steps to observe these volplane flights of Chlamydosaurus.

Unfortunately, this does not seem to have happened, so for now, this intriguing subject is very much up in the air. Whether the same can be said can be said of the frilled lizard itself, therefore, remains to be seen – literally! (10)

REFERENCES

1.Wikipedia Draco volans http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Draco_volans

2. Handwritten notes of Mr R.Hardcastle

3. R.Gilroy Out of the Dream Time-The Search for Australia`s Unknown Animals (Katoomba: URU Publications,2006) p.294

4. Pennsylvania Bristol Bucks County Gazette June 20th 1895

5.The Queenslander April 11th 1935

6.The Courier-Mail September 16th 1939

7.E-mail from Dale Drinnon to Richard Muirhead December 20th 2010

8.The Argus July 25th 1911

9. The Argus August 8th 1911

10. Dr C. Fenner Bunyips and Billabongs (Sydney: Angus and Robertson,1933) in Dr K.P.N. Shuker Extraordinary Animals Revisited (Bideford: CFZ Press, 2007) p. 160

Apparitions in the Air, Cheshire, 1651

By A.J.F.

The following article appeared in The Cheshire Sheaf, vol 56 May, 1961, pages 40-41

Apparitions in the air in 1651

The following strange pamphlet is taken from the Thomason Tracts in the British Museum E.628.16. It is written in the form of a letter dated 29 April 1651, and purporting to be from one William Radmore, to his Brother.

"Wonderful News from the **North:** Being a true and perfect Relation of severall strange and Wonderful Apparitions seen in the Ayr, between Madely and Whitmore, in the County Palatine of Chester

This Relation was taken by the Minister of Madely,and the truth thereof verified by Mrs. Holt of Oakershill, who with her Maid, were eye witnesses thereof.

London. Printed for George Horton. 1651

" I shall relate to you, a strange Apparition that was seen near to us, on Wednesday the II of this instant, at a place called the Highwayhouse, between Madely and Whitmore: The Woman to whom it appeared, was and is a Religious Woman, and come of a godly Family, the manner thus: On the said day the Woman Sitting in the door with a little Girl in her arms, she perceived the Sun to shine exceeding red, and casting her eyes upwards, she beheld a dark body over the sun, about the bigness of a half moon, and in a short space , the said body divided into several parts, seeming numberless to her view, about the bigness of small Pewter dishes, which came swiftly towards her and immediately the Court about the house seemed to be filled with armed Hands and Gauntlets, with swords; glittering and fighting (in their imagination) with another as great an Army, and it seemed to their view to be in the ayr above them.

At the site whereof, she was amazed, and being greatly astonished, ran into the house, having left behinde her another little Girle playing forth of the doors, her Maid and she presently betaking themselves to prayer, and after receiving some encouragement, they opened the door, and the Maid boldly stept forth and took in the child (to her supposition from amongst them) which had no harm; But the numbers so encreased on both parties, that the House became all darkened like night: Then when she got in her childe, she went to prayer again, verily supposing her end to be near at hand; After which her Maid and she looking forth, beheld infinite of Horse legs and feet trampling, and great Canons and Ordnance on the other side of the House rear`d up together, with their muzzles upwards, and the Houlsters hanging on them; this continued some space and vanished. Then she opened the door and went forth, and saw the likeness of one man onely, standing within the Court near to the mote, and immediately there arose a little Cloud or Vapour (as it were) forth of the mote, from whence issued a Bird about the bigness of a Capon, with wings such as an Angel is usually portraicted with, and a second and third followed and flew near to her and her Maid, having faces almost like Owls, and something resembling a man, and after they had hovered about a while, they vanished in vapour or Cloud; These birds were of a blewish-red, or sanguine colour, but the Men, Horse, Swords, and Canons, all like fire.

I had almost forgot one passage, her Maid at first saw nothing, but after she had uttered these words, Mistris it may be the Lord wil not suffer me to behold what you do, she immediately saw the same. Oh who would not fear and love thee thou King of Saints, how unsearchable are thy ways, to poor hoodwinckt mortals.....

A.J.F

Ezekiel's Wheels

by GOD and Richard Muirhead

Fig 1 Ezekiel`s Wheels

Reproduced with the kind permission
of Rolf Stark of Biblical-art.com from " Die Bilder zur Bibel"
(Peter Meinhold, 1965)

Ezekiel chapter 1 verses 15-21 " As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They sparkled like chrysolite, and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel. As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced; the wheels did not turn about as

the creatures went. Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were full of eyes all around."

"When the living creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go,and the wheels would rise along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When the creatures moved, they also moved; when the creatures stood still, they also stood still; and when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. "

This is about God not an U.F.O.

For a Christian approach to U.F.O.s see http://www.be-ready.org/ufos.html

Flying Snakes Part 1

by Dale Drinnon

This blog originally appeared in Cryptozoology Online

on January 23rd 2011

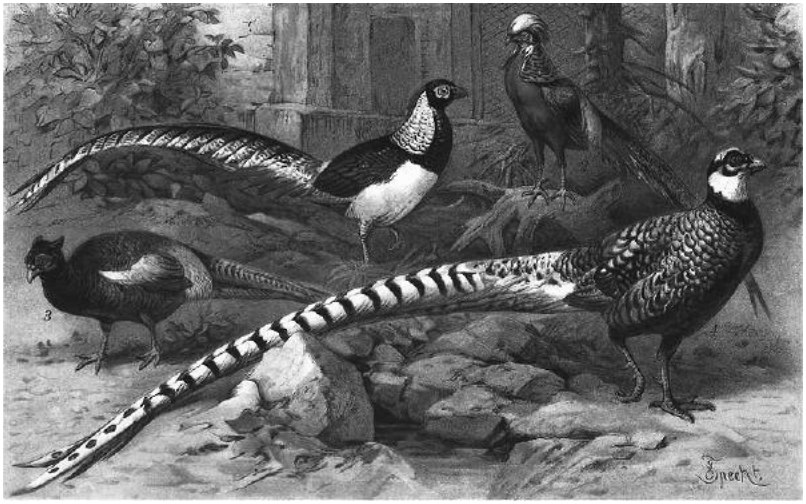
Oll Lewis from the CFZ is a font of information on Welsh cryptozoology.He did an excellent blog post a while back on one of the Welsh cryptids named the **Gwiber,** specifically a variety of flying snake or dragonet of South Glamorgan.Gwibers are reported all over Wales in folklore but it was in Penllyn they are reported more recently in Marie Trevelyn`s *Folklore and Folkstories of Wales* from 1909:

"The woods around Penllyne Castle,Glamorgan, had the reputation of being frequented by winged serpents,and these were the terror of old and young alike. An aged inhabitant of Penllyne who died a few years ago, said that in his boyhood the winged serpents were described as very beautiful. They were coiled when in repose, and " looked as though they were covered in jewels of all sorts.Some of them had crests sparkling with all the colours of the rainbow. When disturbed they glided swiftly, "sparkling all over," to their hiding places. When angry, they " flew over people`s heads, with outspread wings bright and sometimes with eyes,too,like the feathers in a peacock`s tail. " He said it was " no old story," invented to "frighten children", but a real fact. His father and uncles had killed some of them, for they were "as bad as foxes for poultry" This old man attributed the extinction of winged serpents to the fact that they were " terrors in the farmyards and coverts."

Oll goes into some depth on the mystery in his post and he did attempt some interviews. His conclusion: the creatures are reported as unlikely to exist. Some facts do stand out from the traditions: one is that a feathered skin from one of these flying serpents was kept by one family for many years. Whatever else might be said, a feathered skin is a real object and feathers necessarily mean the creature was a **bird**. Another feature is that these creatures could sometimes be seen seemingly "coiled up". Several long-necked birds sleep with the head and neck curled back towards the tail and some long tailed birds also throw the tail around the front. Furthermore, these flying serpents are often said to have clawed feet and the claws are also said to be poisonous. **`Gwiber`** means `viper` and is the same as the French ` voivre` from which we derive the term ` wvre` or **wyvern.**

A wyvern is a smallish two-legged and winged dragon, and wyverns are traditional over many parts of Western Europe. They may have their exact counterparts in Eastern Europe in the aitavars and other creatures that are simultaneously `dragons` and like barnyard fowl, sometimes described as having tails of fire, some `firedrakes` and perhaps the Russian firebirds. If this is so, then we seem to have two distinctive populations where the gaudy males are divided by their coloration, a Western branch which is primarily green, and an Eastern branch where the males are primarily red. And the Welsh folklore, when speaking of the flying serpents describes their feathers as peacock-like. That does also determine what kind of creature they really are- they are pheasants (peacocks and domestic fowl are also related to pheasants.)

Since I had already seen where the anhinga was described as a flying snake because of its long neck, I assumed that the gwiber or wyvern was a sort of a large pheasant with a very large neck and a very large tail. It might also be the same as a **cockatrice, which Wikipedia** describes as a sort of a fowl with a long lizard like (snake like or dragon-like) tail. It is said to be particularly vicious and is said to have a venomous breath (or a venomous bite, or venomous claws, or a lethal gaze); any of those descriptions could be probably taken as awful warnings that people should keep well away from them, but they need not be true: people are always saying any number of perfectly harmless animals are venomous, especially when they are snakes. Believing that the long-necked and long-tailed pheasant was a viper would just about be typical: the flying serpent reports that turned out to be anhingas also insisted on their potent venom



The Welsh flying snakes are said to be quite aggressive and to kill poultry when given a chance.They will also attack travellers and they are said to be roused to fury at the sight of a red cloth. Reports in this general category of flying snakes commonly put the length down as from six or nine feet.

The largest kind of pheasant is the Reeve`s pheasant, native to China. It has a very long tail and can regularly grow to over six feet long, up to eight feet long. The size is in the right range, and adding a long snake-like neck to such a bird would make it even longer. It is a hardy bird able to stand extremes of cold and heat, and the males are said to be hostile to humans,dogs,and especially to males of other pheasant types. If they are being raised together, Reeve`s cocks must be kept . separate from the males of other kinds because of this aggressive nature

The hen Reeve`s pheasant is as large as the male of the common (ring-necked) pheasant and already has a fairly long tail of its own. This could lead to the tale that cockatrices arise from eggs laid from roosters; peasants unfamiliar with the bird might well mistake the hen for the rooster of another species.

END OF PART ONE

FIGURES

1. Wyvern and Cockatrice from Church, Exeter.
2. Flying Serpent from Deviant Art.
3. Wyvern
4. Pheasants to scale from Wikipedia
5. Cock and Hen Reeve's Pheasants. Copyright Dale Drinnon.

The Giant Centipedes of Hong Kong

by Richard Muirhead and Mike Hardcastle

According to scientific orthodoxy, in the form of `***Hong Kong Animals***` by Dennis S.Hill and Karen Phillipps there are 4 species of centipede in Hong Kong. These are in ascending order of size: The Long-legged Centipede Thereupoda clunifera, the Smaller Forest Centipede Scolopendra morsitans , the Urban Giant Centipede Scolopendra multidens and finally S.dehanni. This short essay will be concerned with S.multidens in particular, extraordinary large specimens of which have turned up in Hong Kong over the last 100 years. There was also a species of centipede in Hong Kong called Scutigera at the time the naturalist Geoffrey Herklots`s `***The Hong Kong Countryside throughout the seasons***` was published in 1951 but according to Max Blake of the Centre for Fortean Zoology:

"To my knowledge no Scutigera is found in Hong Kong" Max also said " Well S.gigas doesn`t actually exist itself, it is a synonym of S.gigantea. As far as I can see, the two species are totally separate coming from Venezuela and S.multidens coming from around Taiwan and neighbouring countries. "(1)

Geoffrey Herklots wrote in the `***The Hong Kong Countryside***`: concerning the Scutigera:

"There is another large centipede found in Hong Kong, and in other parts of the tropics called *Scutigera,* the shield-bearer, which scuttles or runs very quickly. These have very long legs which lift the body well above the ground and they run about during the day as well as at night in search of small insects on which they feed. A friend of mine calls these scuttlers, emperor centipedes. They are much feared by the Chinese who say that their bite is fatal to man; this is of course quite untrue."(2)

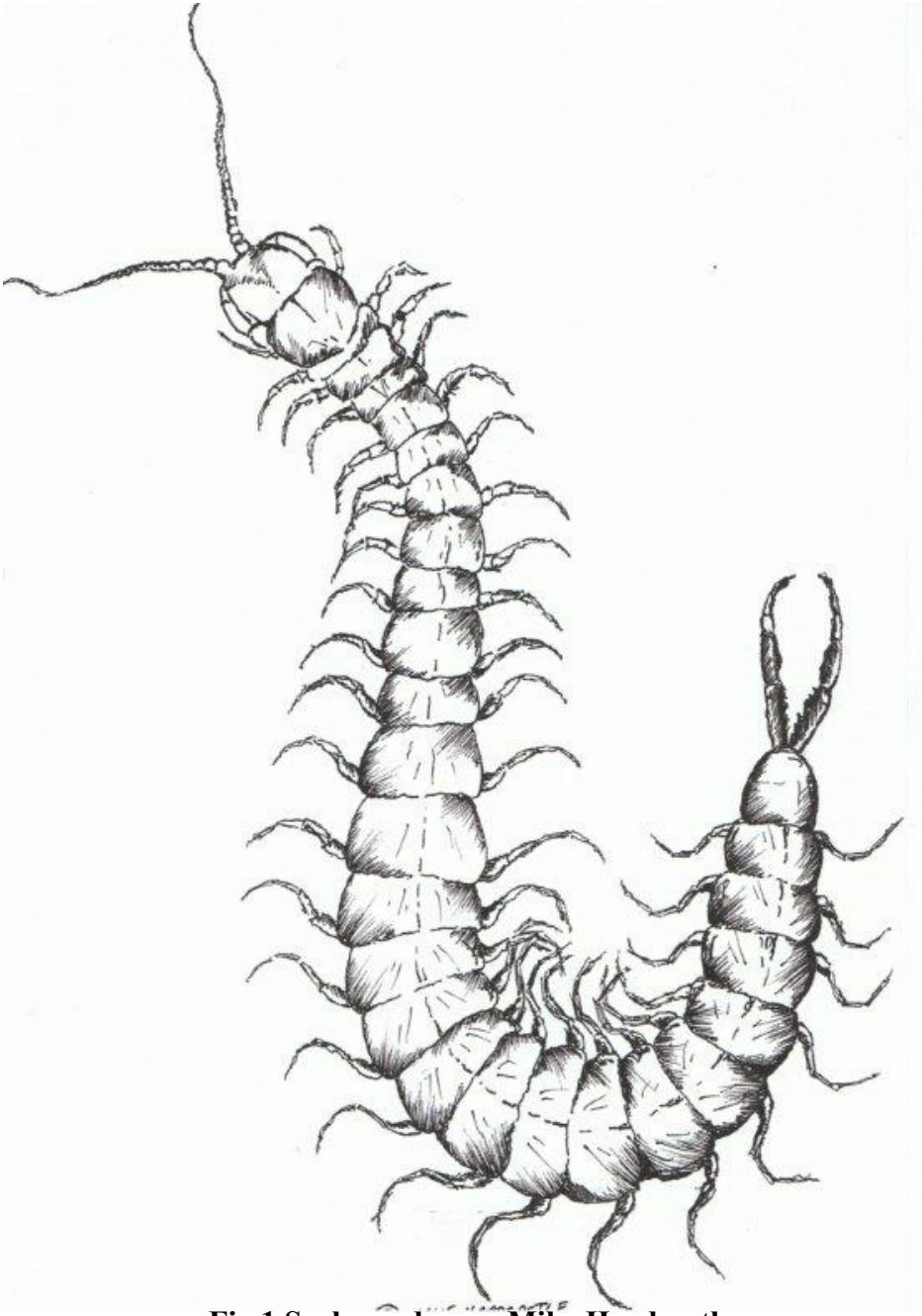


Fig 1 Scolopendra sp. Mike Hardcastle.

Another mystery is the presence of Scolopendra subspinipes in Hong Kong, but as far as I know this species is not now in the former Colony. This species is also known as the Vietnamese centipede. (3) However S.multidens is a sub-species of S.subspinipes.

Figure 1 shows Mike Hardcastle`s representation of Scolopendra based upon an image on the Internet. Based upon web sites including a Flickr phot at http://www.flickr.com/photos/lat3ralus/4972286219/in/pool-1456628@N20/

Hill and Phillipps say about S.multidens:

" *Scolopendra multidens* (Urban Giant Centipede)

A large brown centipede, this `urban giant` measures 10-13cm in body length, and has a body composed of a series of long and short segments. Each leg is tipped with a single sharp spine. Under the head is a pair of large black-tipped poison fangs. The bite of a small species is painfull so it is assumed that the bite of a large *Scolopendra* is very painful.They are reputed to be able to kill small mice with their poison, although it is to be expected that their normal prey would be American Cockroach. If handled, they are very quick to bite."

The other large local species is S.dehanni, which is identifiable by having only three spines on the last pair of legs as opposed to the seven spines on each last leg of S.multidens (five dorsal and two ventral) Also, it is ecologically different in being a forest litter species. (4)

In my Muirhead`s Mysteries blog in `***Cryptozoology Online***` of September 21st 2010 `Giant centipedes in Hong Kong` I wrote the following, reproduced with the permission of Jon Downes, of the CFZ, very slightly amended.

"Anyone who has lived in Hong Kong, especially any entomologist or Fortean, will be aware of the centipedes, Scolopendra spp, sometimes red in colour that live in many parts of the former British territory. They certainly lived on the Peak, where Jon and I lived as youngsters from the 1960s-1980s.

It is known that these myriapods can attain a length of nearly 30cm/1ft. However, there are claims that these centipedes can grow to 60cm long; that is 2ft! (Thank you to Heywood`s Mathematical Genius Lizzy for this conversion; it took me several years to get O Level Maths).

In one of those bizarre Fortean incidents, at the end of last week I was browsing the online Hong Kong newspaper archive, which like some quasi-bibliographical giant, rarely sleeps in this house, and I accidentally typed in the words GIANT CENTIPEDE in capitals thus, when 99% of the time I type the words in lower case, and I came up with the most interesting of the total of only 7 hits, dated June 30th 1924, front page of the *Hong Kong Telegraph* http://hkclweb.hkpl.gov.hk/hkclr2/internet/eng/html/frm-bas_srch.html (This is the website for the search engine not this issue of the HK Telegraph.)

There is a very similar story from March 19th 1948 this time from *The China Mail*.....it read:

" 2-Foot Long Centipede A giant centipede, almost two feet long, was caught and destroyed in the 3rd floor kitchen of No 80 Fuk Wa Street Kowloon, [N.W.Kowloon-Richard] on Tuesday [March 16th-R]. The large insect was discovered near the fireplace and killed with a piece of firewood by one of the inmates of the flat" [Inmates,that`s an interesting choice of words, what was he a prisoner?-R] Interestingly the 1948 centipede was also found in Kowloon, that part of the mainland directly across the harbour from Hong Kong."(5)

The 1924 item mentions a company called Messrs A.S. Watson & Co in Kowloon. This company still exists and has offices all over Hong Kong including Kowloon Tong which is several miles east of Fuk Wa St.

There is on the Web a video of a giant centipede Scolopendra multidens/S.dehanni on Cheung Chau Giant centipedes (Scolopendra multidens/S.dehanni) are surely Hong Kong`s ultimate creepy-crawlies: not only do they look spooky and grow to 13cm long, they run fast and pack venom they inject through fangs (6) Cheung Chau is an island to the west-south-west of Hong Kong island. I also recall a Facebook contact describe a centipede on The Peak as being c.20cm, in length, but 60cm? How big do centipedes grow?

The 2ft specimen from 1924 is described as S.gigas.

There is an interesting story in *The Hong Kong Daily Press* July 1st 1924, perhaps the editor had the story in his rival paper of the day before in mind (see above). As follows:

SWALLOWED A LIVE CENTIPEDE
AN ANTI-TOXIN: CHINESE WOMAN`S ORDEAL.

A correspondent of the *North China Daily News* writing from Mienchow, Szechuan on June 9th says: " A few days ago a Chinese woman in the city was extremely ill. She went to a local doctor and he prescribed a centipede, charging her three dollars, and instructing her to eat it. It was a poisonous variety and the idea seems to have been that act as an anti-toxin to the poison in her system. It made her very ill. Her face and lips swelled to such an extent that she ate no food for five days.

This is only one of many examples that might be given which show that the ordinary Chinese is still living in a world that belongs to a far distant past." (7)

[that would have been a classic quote for my *China: A Yellow Peril?* book!]

The Hong Kong Telegraph article of June 30th 1924 is as follows:

A GIANT CENTIPEDE

INTERESTING CAPTURE
AT KOWLOON

How big does a centipede grow? Those persons whose knowledge of this creature of many legs does not extend beyond the species found in temperate zones will probably reply " Only a few inches". But those who have lived for some time in tropic lands will have seen, or heard of centipedes of eight inches or more in length. *Scolopendra gigas,* as its name implies, is the giant of all the centipede genera and species, and attains a length of twelve inches. It is found in the warm regions of Asia, and local residents will be interested to know that one of these gigantic representatives of the tribe has been captured in the heart of Kowloon`s residential area-whether a native of the place, or brought originally in timber from further south, cannot yet be said.
Last Saturday night, Mr J.Gibson of Messrs. A.S.Watson & Co`s dispensary in Kowloon heard what he took to be mice scampering along the floor of a room over the dispensary, where workmen have recently been carrying out certain repairs.

Mr Gibson investigated, and found a huge centipede crossing the room. Anxious not to damage it, he looked around for some means of capturing it alive. His eye lighted on a soup plate, and at some risk to himself he placed the plate over the creature and had it imprisoned. Going down to the dispensary,he procured some chloroform, and poured a small pool of the drug on the drug on the floor beside the plate. Maneouvring this, he draw it over the chloroform, with the centipede still underneath, and the anesthetic put the quietus on the struggling *Scolopendra*.

The centipede now reposes in a bottle of alchohol, in the dispensary, and although it has shrunk slightly through immersion in the spirit it is still over ten inches in length. When alive, Mr Gibson estimates, it must have been quite a foot long. This monster centipede has two wicked looking calliper jaws, and twenty-three pairs of legs.

The term “centipede” is misleading, for these creatures have a varying number of legs, ranging from fifteen pairs in some species to one hundred and seventy-three pairs in others. The allied “ millipedes” are all not necessarily blessed with a thousand feet.

The bite of most tropical species of centipedes, such as Scolopendra, is painful, and under certain circumstances even dangerous. Some kinds of centipedes are harmless, like the slender,phosphorescent ones seen on walls and sometimes erroneously termed “earwigs” under the impression that they creep into a sleeper`s ears. Centipedes are related to insects but (with millipedes) belong to a class by themselves the Myriapoda, which is a self-explanatory term. They lurk beneath stones, or in dark places in houses and come forth at night in search of small insects. (8)

REFERENCES

1. E-mail from Max Blake to Richard Muirhead February 6th 2011
2. G.Herklots The Hong Kong Countryside (Hong Kong:various sources1860-1952) p.?
3. G.Herklots Ibid p.138 and E-mail from Mike Hardcastle February 25th 2011
4. D.S.Hill and K.Phillipps Hong Kong Animals (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1981) p.218
5. The China Mail March 19th 1948
6. Giant centipede on Cheung Chau http://www.hkoutdoors.com/videos/giant-centipede-on-cheung-chau Accessed 20/09/2010
7. The Hong Kong Daily Press July 1st 1924
8. The Hong Kong Telegraph June 30th 1924

The South Shields Devil Crabs

by Mike Hallowell

Two years ago, my book *Mystery Animals of the British Isles: Northumberland & Tyneside* (CFZ Press, 2008) informed readers about a cryptid called the Cleadon Big Cat, a terrifying sea monster at Marsden Bay called the Shony and a fascinating entity known as the Giant Lobster of Trow Rocks. Since then I've written up stories about a desiccated mermaid on display in a barber's shop, an entity called the Horse-Man of Bede and a weird man-beast from Hebburn known as Blue Eyes, not to mention a huge, hairy hominid said to wander Cleadon Hills after dark.

Now South Tyneside is the smallest Metropolitan Borough in the country, and you'd think its residents would be pleased to brag about one cryptid, let alone seven. However, against all the odds it seems another cryptozoological conundrum may have to be added to our rich and varied folklore.

Two years ago whilst chatting to Ronan Coghlan, I purchased a copy of his *book A Dictionary of Cryptozoology*, (Xiphos Books, 2004) and have to confess its one of the most fascinating tomes I've ever come across. Now here's the funny bit; I fascinated myself by imbibing strange tales of the Antarctic Narwhal, the Hairy Fish and the Sherwood Forest Thing. Then, without warning, my eyes were drawn to a short entry entitled, *South Shields Crab*. As I only live a very short distance from South Shields, and have written literally hundreds of articles concerning its Fortean history, I must be forgiven for becoming somewhat excited.

According to Ronan, the possibility exists that a hitherto unrecognised species of crab might be living off our coastline, although he does acknowledge that it could just possibly be, "a colour variation of a known species".

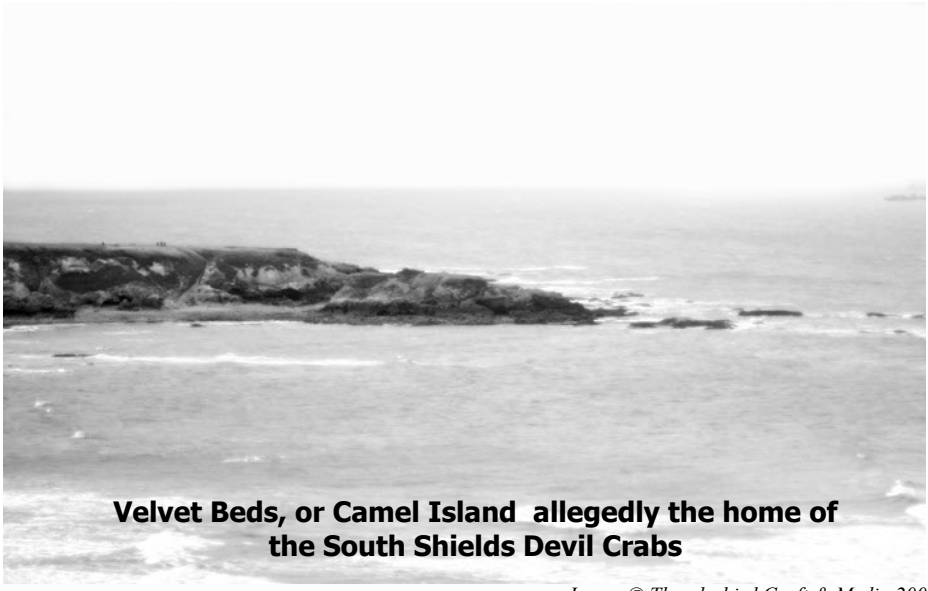
Well, I've heard tales about these mystery crabs before, and they fascinate me.

Some years ago I had several engaging conversations with the late archaeologist Evelyn Waugh-Almond (she was alive then, for the record) and she told me that just off the northerly aspect of Marsden Bay, at the rocky outcrop known as Velvet Beds or Camel Island, there were "crabs living unknown to man".

Now back in Victorian times, Velvet Beds was a favourite pic-nic spot. Hordes of mothers, fathers and their offspring would go there with meat pies, ham sandwiches and tubs of

potted brawn to take in the sea air, which was said to be most efficacious in the treatment of the humours and, if you were unfortunate enough to have them, the vapours.

At that time the rock was covered in a thick carpet of lush, dark green grass which supposedly felt "just like a bed of velvet" under one's feet. According to tradition, that's how the rock came to be known as Velvet Beds. The grass has all but gone now – only a few tufts remain – and most folk refer to the rock as Camel Island due to the fact that rapid erosion of the striated Magnesian limestone has left it looking like a camel's hump.



Velvet Beds, or Camel Island allegedly the home of the South Shields Devil Crabs

Image © Thunderbird Craft & Media 2008

But there's another tradition, which espouses the idea that the rock gained its name from the large number of velvet crabs which inhabited the waters around it.

Evelyn told me that the crabs "unknown to man" looked like velvet crabs, but were taxonomically different. They were alleged to have a "nasty disposition" and were extremely aggressive. This, plus their distinctive red eyes – also possessed by velvet crabs, I've been told – led to them being given the alternative monikers of Devils Crabs and Witches Crabs.

One correspondent told me that the crabs at Velvet Beds can grow to a width of 14 inches, which makes them far larger than the average velvet crab. To my knowledge, none of this size have ever been caught. Trevor Wilkinson, another reader of my *WraithScape* newspaper column, told me that they can grow to "enormous size". Just how enormous he was unable to say.

Rowan references *Animals and Men* as his source for the story, but doesn't give a particular month or year or provide the issue number, so I'm hoping Jon Downes might be able to provide some more detail on this cryptozoological enigma. I've put out a call to all South Tyneside's *craberati*, hoping that someone might come forth with a photograph, a specimen or at least an anecdotal tale or two.

The Pink-Tusked Elephants of Tang Dynasty China

by Richard Muirhead

In early 1999 I began investigating the black elephants which inhabited the districts of Hsün and Lei, China in T`ang Dynasty China 618-907 A.D. There is even one report of them being alive at the "beginning of the 19th century" according to `Celestial lancets: a history and rationale of acupuncture and moxa` (1) by Gwei-Djen Lu, Joseph Needham and V.Lo. Dr Karl Shuker noticed my query which was on cz@onelist.com and summarized my research in his `Alien Zoo` column in `Fortean Times` 122 May 1999 :

Think Pink

"The onelist cryptotozoology discussion group has yielded some fascinating snippets of previously overlooked or little publicised data since its establishment last year. One the latest stems from the online revelations of cryptozoological researcher Richard Muirhead that Edward Schafer`s book `The Vermilion Bird` (1967) , concerning life in T`ang Dynasty China (618 – 907 AD) , refers to a race of black elephants in Hsün and Lei, corresponding to the Leizhou Peninsula and southeastern Guangxi Province. It appears that this peculiar form of pachyderm has been formally dubbed Elephas maximus rubridens by zoologist Dr P.E.P Deranagala, who used as his type specimen a depiction published in 1925 of an antique Chinese bronze statuette, held at Chicago Field Museum of Natural History. Can Fortean Times readers supply any further details re these elephantine enigmas? If so, you know where to write. Assorted cz@onelist communications,Fortean Times Feb-Mar 1999 (2) "

As far as I know Karl didn`t receive any further significant information about Elephas maximus rubridens, nor did I.. In `The Vermilion Bird` Schafer said: "Herds of wild elephants trampled the cultivated fields of Honan and Hupeh in the fifth Christian century, and were not a rarity in Huai- nan in the sixth.(3) "In T`ang times, they still roamed the woodlands of Nam-Viet, and were even abundant in the northern counties of Ch`ao and Hsün." (4) "One T`ang source tells of a race of black elephants with small pink tusks in Hsün and Lei." (5) "Perhaps this describes the true Chinese race itself, whose furious representatives had been subdued by the agents of the kings of Shang.In any case, the peoples of Nam-Viet caught and killed them with poisoned arrows in T`ang times, and roasted their trunks to make delicacies for tropical feasts, (6) the tusks, or some of them, were sent to northern artisans for conversion into chopsticks, hairpins, combs, plectrums, footrules, note tablets, and for inlays in fancy cabinet work, the ivory being dyed in a variety of colours." (7). "The naturally pink ivory of the local elephants was well favoured, indeed regarded as equal to the ivory

imported from overseas, but the bulk of the regular tribute ivory for the use of the court came from Hunan-chou in Annam. (8) I know nothing of its natural colour".

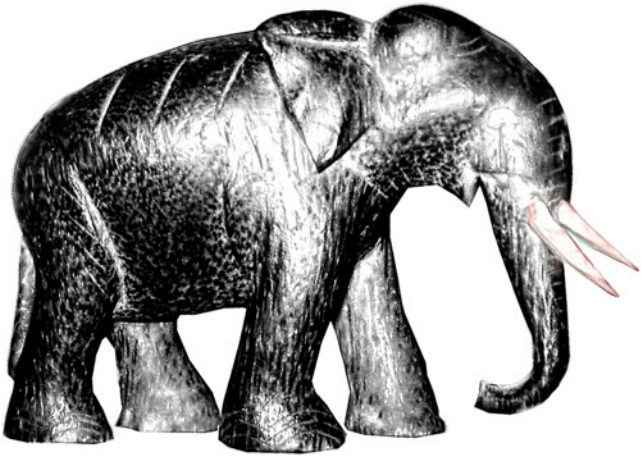


Image © Thunderbird Craft & Media 2010

In 2010 I obtained a copy of Berthold Laufer`s ` Ivory in China` from the Bodleian, Oxford: Laufer said: "Ivory occupies a very prominent place in the art of the Far East, and Chinese carvers in ivory have always stood in the front rank of their craft….(9) The archaeology of ivory and the older real works of art created in the substance have almost wholly been neglected." Later Laufer said, of the twelth century: " The tusks imported by the Arabs [to China-Richard] are described by a contemporary observer as being straight and of a clear, white colour, with patterns displaying delicate lines. In weight they varied from fifty to a hundred pounds, whereas the tusks coming from Tonking and Camboja were small, weighing only from ten to twenty or thirty pounds, and had a reddish tint." (10)

John Moore in a posting on cz@onelist.com on February 28th 1999 said:

" Those interested in this animal may wish to check out the work of P.E.P Deraniyagala, who named what appears to be the same animal Elephas rubridens on the basis of textual and artistic evidence (Deraniyagala, Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Session, Ceylon Association of Science pt 3 p. 10 1950) ; see also the same author, Spolia Zeylanica 26 (1951) : pp 50-51 and Some Extinct Elephants, Their Relatives and the Two Living Species (1955), pp 124-125. Deryagala`s source for the information on this elephant is B.Laufer, 1925, Ivory in China. Field Museum of Natural History Anthroplogy Leaflet 21." (11)

Shoshani and Tassy (The Proboscidea p.370) list Elephas maximus rubridens as a synonym of E.maximus but do not discuss it further (12)

Someone calling himself/herself `Blackhawk` sent an e-mail on the same date to cz@onelist.com saying:

"Just curious, but was Deraniyagala`s identification of the beast accepted under the rules of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature? If it was how did he get past the rule of thumb requiring at least a holotype in some form or the other." (13)

The Internet is not always accurate as we all know, including on matters elephantine. Witness the following statement on the Civilization Fanatics Forum, a gaming forum, about Elephas maximus rubridens:

" Today, only two main species exist, but in the time of the Nabateans [3rd century B.C to at least 106 AD - Richard] four separate species were known at that time,and could have been used for warfare. One thousand years earlier, several races of Asian and African elephants had become extinct (about 1500 B.C.) For example the Elephas maximus rubridens existed in China as far north as Anyang, in northern Honan province. Writings from the 14th century B.C. state that elephants were still to be found in Kwangsi Province. " (14)

Dale Drinnon has stated:

"I believe you sent me an inquiry an inquiry about the pink-tusked elephant……..My opinion is that actually the reported colouration cannot be trusted, it might originally have been only an artistic convention, and that otherwise, unusual colouration is a very dubious indicator for new species. Many Cryptozoologists attach too great an importance to that. There are a good many putative Cryptid variations on the Asiatic elephant but so far as we can tell, all of them are only rare variations of one overall species. " (15)

REFERENCES

1. G. Djen-Lu, J.Needham, V.Lo Celestial lancets: a history and rationale of acupuncture and moxa (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002) p. 3172. K.Shuker Alien Zoo Fortean Times 199 May 1999. p. 19

3. E.Schafer The Vermillion Bird T`ang Images of the South (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967) p. 224 citing E.Schafer War Elephants in Ancient and Medieval China,Oriens , Vol 10 (1957) pp 289-291

4. E. Schafer Ibid p 224 citing Liu Hsün Ling piao lu b 6

5. E.Schafer Ibid pp 224-225 citing Tuan Kung-lu Pei hu lu 2 8a

6. E.Schafer Ibid p.225 citing Liu Hsün Ling piao lu b 6; Pei hu lu ,2 ,8a-8b; Tai Chün fu , Kuang I chi in T`ai p`ing kuang chi, 441, 4a

7. E.Schafer The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of T`ang Exotics (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963) p.240

8. E.Schafer op cit p. 225 citing Pei hu lu ,2, 8a-8b; Li Chi fu, Yüan ho chün hsien (t`u) chih 38, 1086; E.Schafer and B.Wallacker Local Tribute Products of the T`ang Dynasty Journal of Oriental Studies Vol 4 (1957-1958) pp 213-248

9. B.Laufer Ivory in China. Anthropolgy Leaflet No. 1 (Chicago:Field Museum of Natural History,1925) p.1

10. B.Laufer Ibid p.17

11. E-mail from J.Moore to cz@onelist.com February 28th 1999

12. Shoshani and Tassy The Proboscidea Evolution and Palaeoecology of Elephants and Their Relatives (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) p.370

13. E-mail from `Blackhawk` to cz@onelist.com February 28th 1999.

14. Rambuchan`s posting on Civilization Fanatics Forum website September 14th 2005

15. E-mail from Dale Drinnon to Richard Muirhead January 11th 2011

The Israeli Mermaid

by Zvi Ron

The world was astounded to hear reports from Israel about a mermaid sighted on the beach of Kiryat Yam, a town north of Haifa. The sightings began in August 2009 and were widely reported all over the world. Most accounts followed the original Jerusalem Post article . (1) The article stated that "dozens of sightings" had been reported over the past few months. Town council spokesman Natti Zilberman is a central figure in all newspaper articles on this subject. He is quoted as saying, "Many people are telling us they are sure they've seen a mermaid and they are all independent of each other," and "People say it is half girl - half fish, jumping like a dolphin. It does all kinds of tricks, then disappears." Shlomo Cohen, a retired career soldier, reported that he and five friends saw a woman who, "was laying on the sand in a weird way" and jumped into the water upon being spotted, it was then that they noticed that "she had a tail." (2) A thirteen year old boy named Uri told reporters of his mermaid sighting, describing a creature with a fin and long satin hair, but spiky in front. She was too far away so Uri did not see her face and could not tell the reporter if she was beautiful. (3) Zilberman offered a million dollar reward to anyone who can provide proof of the existence of the Kiryat Yam mermaid. When asked if the council of Kiryat Yam has the money to pay the reward Zilberman explained "I believe, if there really is a mermaid, then so many people and tourists will come to Kiryat Yam, a lot more money will be made than one million dollars." (4)

While insisting that it was not a publicity stunt, the mermaid reports were widely perceived as such. Kiryat Yam residents had long dreamed of something that would "transform it from an unemployment-cursed and crime-ridden blue-collar town of 45,000 residents into a flourishing resort". (5) The mermaid reports did in fact put Kiryat Yam on the tourist map, attracting many people to the town's beach, hoping for a glimpse of the mermaid and a chance at the reward money. (6) As a result of the increased tourism, Zilberman announced that the town would soon open its first hotel. (7) A new boardwalk was constructed along the beach, displaying a statue of a mermaid, sent from Hungary. Reports surfaced that the municipality was attempting to sell "Mermaid Beach" to investors for three million dollars, something which is against the law. (8) When reporters asked Zilberman for the contact information of the eyewitnesses, he replied that they do not have cell phones but if the reporters would visit Kiryat Yam in person, the witnesses will be happy to discuss what they saw. (9)

This is not the first time council spokesman Natti Zilberman has been involved in what seems to be a publicity stunt aimed at attracting tourists to his town. He had previously announced that the town would import lion dung from the Ramat Gan safari to scare off wild horses in the vicinity and that local teens would be collecting jellyfish from the beach in order to sell to workers from China who consider jellyfish a delicacy. At a press

conference, Zilberman claimed that jellyfish sales would add fifty thousand shekels to the town's coffers annually. This announcement was greeted with laughter from the assembled journalists. The importing of lion dung and mass jellyfish captures never took place, but served to keep Kiryat Yam in the news for some time. (10)

But there may be somewhat more substance to the mermaid sightings than Zilberman's reputation would lead us to believe. The mermaid reports attracted a documentary crew from the United States television network NBC. The film crew spent a whole week on the beach of Kiryat Yam and filmed morning and night, both underwater and above it. The crew claimed that during one of the late night outings they managed to spot a human figure dipping in the water – and then disappearing underwater. The show's researchers hurried and dived after the figure, but were unable to trace it. The show's findings, along with the footage shot by several bystanders, were transferred to the Center for Coastal Ocean Research in Los Angeles. The center's director, Michael Shacht, examined the evidence and said that it was impossible to unequivocally determine that the figure in the footage was indeed a mermaid. According to Shacht, the team might have succeeded in capturing the rare phenomenon on tape. The investigative report received many responses in the United States and drew a lot of interest among viewers and ocean and sea researchers around the world. (11) There has been no follow up reported since then regarding this documentary.

It did not take long for the Kiryat Yam mermaid to be co-opted for various political and ideological purposes. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) announced that they would feature the Kiryat Yam mermaid in a billboard campaign to encourage vegetarianism. (12) An American organization claiming to defend the rights of mermaids threatened to appeal to the International Court of Justice in The Hague against the town of Kiryat Yam over the prize money offered for evidence of the mermaid. The organization, presenting itself as the Mermaid Medical Association in Brooklyn, New York, claimed to be shocked to hear about the prize offered by the town, saying it "badly and outrageously damages the legendary mermaid legacy." The organization informed the municipality that it had 10 days to take back its announcement of the prize, or they would approach the International Court of Justice in the Netherlands and demand that it intervene. (13) Though reported uncritically by many media outlets, the lawsuit turned out to be a hoax. The Mermaid Medical Association turned out to be a health clinic on Mermaid Ave. in Brooklyn, New York. (14) The receptionist there was confused when asked about the letter sent to Kiryat Yam, claiming to know nothing at all about the matter. “Do we even have mermaids?” she asked. “I’ve never seen one.” The entire story was then used to demonstrate the lack of proper investigation when dealing with news from the Middle East. (15) It is probable that the lawsuit hoax was initiated to poke fun at the constant barrage of attacks against Israel on human rights grounds, perceived by many Israelis to be knee-jerk responses to just about anything that takes place in Israel.

Is the Kiryat mermaid real? For the residents of Kiryat Yam the mermaid has generated an influx of tourism, investment and interest. What could be more real than that? has generated an influx of tourism, investment and interest. What could be more real than that?

Fig 1 Map of Northern Israel.

Kiryat Yam is just up the coast from Haifa. See
http://www.alamagorhouse.com/images/mapisrael.jpg

REFERENCES

1. Jerusalem Post , “Mermaid sightings reported in Kiryat Yam”, August 11,2009.

2. Arutz Sheva News, “Mermaid spotted on Kiryat Yam beach”, August 12, 2009.

3. Haaretz, “How the mermaid changed the lives of the residents of Kiryat Yam”, September 25,2009.

4. Jerusalem Post, “Mermaid sightings reported in Kiryat Yam”, August 11, 2009.

5. Haaretz, “Tough blue-collar town wants to become a prime tourist destination,” February 21, 2008.

6. Haaretz, “Is a mermaid living under the sea in Northern Israel?”, August 12, 2009

7. Nrg.org, “Kiryat Yam: Still looking for the mermaid,” November 17, 2009

8. Channel 2 News, “Kiryat Yam is selling “ Mermaid Beach” unlawfully”, December 6, 2009

9. Haaretz, “How the mermaid changed the lives of the residents of Kiryat Yam”, September 25, 2009.

10. Chadashot HaKriyot, “Fairy tales from Kiryat Yam”, issue 209, August 2010

11. Ynet, “NBC: Kiryat Yam mermaid might be real,” April 5, 2010.

12. Jerusalem Post, “PETA plans Kiryat Yam billboard featured a topless mermaid,” August 26, 2009.

13. Ynet, “Kiryat Yam to be sued over mermaid?”, August 24, 2009.

14. New Jersey Jewish News, “A (half-woman half-) fish tale”, August 25, 2009.

15. New Jersey Jewish News, “Reporting sinks mermaid story,” August 26, 2009

A Wildcat from Shaftesbury, Dorset

by Andy Scott

Whilst on holiday in Dorset (the last week of May 2010) my partner and I walked in a quiet park (called a breathing space) in Shaftesbury which looked out onto an expanse of marshland/meadow. Looking through binoculars I noted a pheasant and a rabbit, then as I scrolled right towards the edge of the meadow near to the woodland I spotted a big cat with dark tabby-like markings, it immediately struck me how big it was from a distance of about ¼ of a mile,its tail was thicker than a domestic cat and as I observed it, the cat turned its head and I could see the wild stare in its eyes as it looked straight into my binoculars, I instantly knew it was a wild cat at that moment and asked my partner to look at it also, which she did, then as I went to look again it was there for a last fleeting look as I saw it snake through the marsh grass towards the woods. The adrenalin pumped round my body as the reality of what I had seen sunk in.

I have been brought up around cats all my life, and am fully aware of the size of domestic and even feral cats and this was neither. It was much larger (aprox 3 feet) and moved differently. I think it sensed I was observing it or smelt my scent which prompted it to disappear as quickly as it had appeared. The whole sighting lasted about 2 minutes.

Andy is a good friend of mine and has written about a Coypu in a Yorkshire attic in Animals and Men 19 page 20.

In December 2010 Marcus Matthews e-mailed me and said:

There have been two wildcats found- one at Swindon and one near Salisbury.

Also one near Milton Abbas woods.Wildcat reports do crop up sometimes- I have not come up with anything concrete. (1)

REFERENCE

1 E-mail from Marcus Matthews to Richard Muirhead December 8th 2010

A Scottish Wild Cat from the 1800s.Artist unknown. Reproduced with permission of Dr Karl Shuker.

A Spotted Cat from a 15th Century Hunting Manual

by Marco Masseti

Around about 1997 I bought a post card at the Bodleian Library,Oxford, of an intriguing spotted cat with a long,thin,tail (see illustration on back cover) which at the time I couldn`t identify (see also Animals and Men # 16 1998-1). Fortunately in April 2010 Marco Masseti provided me with enough information about it to find out much more about it. The image is from *The Master of Game,* translated into English by Edward of Norwich,2nd Duke of York. The Bodleian class mark is MS Bodley 546,fol 40 verso.This is what Masseti had to say:

Dear Richard,the image from `The Master of Game` you sent me represents a felid of medium size,characterised by a spotted coat. But,it does not represent any European or African wild cats of the *Felis silvestris* Schreber, 1775,taxonomic group.These are in fact characterised by striped - and not spotted - coats.

The representation of "wild" cats with striped and spotted coats is also found in the "Livre de chasse" written by Gaston Phoebus between the years 1387 and 1389 (see attached file;cf.De Urquijo et al., 1994; see also Longevialle & d`Anthenaise, 2002).But, I think that the latter spotted cats are feral animals,since spotted coats are not known in the wild European population. And,in any case,the spotted cats Gaston Phoebus are very far from the coat patterns of the cat of `The Master of Game` which features black spots on much paler ground colour of the coat.

Medium-sized cats characterised-as the felid represented in `The Master of Game` - by a long tail and a spotted coat are today found in Africa- the small black footed cat, *Felis negripes* Burchell, 1824 - and in the Middle East and south-eastern Asia, such as the marbled cat, *Pardofelis marmorata* (Maertin, 1837), the leopard cat, *Prionailurus bengalensis* (Kerr, 1792), the flat-headed cat, *Prionailurus planiceps* (Vigors & Horsfield, 1827), and the fishing cat, *Prionailurus viverrrinus* (Bennett, 1833).But I don`t believe that the image from `The Master of Game` has to be referred to one of the latter species.We have also to exclude all the American spotted cats due to the fact that America,at that time, was still far to be discovered.In medieval Italy,spotted cats and other wild spotted felids of the genera *Lynx,Caracal* and *Leptailurus,* were ordinarily referred to as g*attopardi.*

In my opinion,in the case of the spotted felid of `The Master of Game` we are dealing with a non-veristic artistic representation.This is not a real cat but the evocation of a *leopard cat,* or-better-of its "idea." The morphological rendering of the animal is too much approximate and not accurate at all,and we can believe that the painter was not familiar with the subject portrayed. He certainly did not have used a live specimen as a model. Thus, this spotted carnivore might be generally referred to a felid species of unknown identification.But of the size of an European wild cat! Furthermore,it can be assumed that,rather than the portrait of a biological element known to the artist, the spotted felid represents a free elaboration of an iconographical model.Whatever its source of inspiration,the image seems to portray a species completely unknown to the artist.

REFERENCES

Cummins J. 1988 - The hound and the hawk. The art of medieval hunting. Weidenfeld and Nicholson,London;306 pp

De Urquijo A Thomas, M & Avril F (eds) , 1994 - Gaston Phoebus. El Libro De La Caza. Editorial Casariego, Madrid: 452 pp

Longevialle C de & Anthenaise C., 2002 - The Hunting Book of Gaston Phebus. Bibliotheque de l`image, Paris/H.Kilczkowski-Onlybook, Madrid: 96pp

Masseti M., 2009-Pictorial evidence from medieval Italy of cheetahs and caracels,and their use in hunting,*Archives of natural history*,36 (1) :37-47

Zebro - an Equine Mystery from Iberia

by Karl Shuker

During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,several Spanish hunting treatises alluded to a mysterious,now vanished equine creature known as the zebro (or encebro, in Aragon), living wild in the Iberian Peninsula. In one of these works, it was described as "an animal resembling a mare, of grey colour with a black band running along the spine and a dark muzzle." Others likened it to a donkey but louder, stronger, and much faster, with a notable temper, and whose hair was streaked with grey and white on its back and legs. What could it have been?

Although largely forgotten nowadays, the zebro experienced a brief revival of interest from science in 1992. That was when archaeologists Carlos Nores and Corina von Lettow-Vorbeck Liesau published a very thought-provoking article in the Spanish scientific magazine Archaeofauna, in which they boldly proposed that the zebro may have been one and the same as an equally enigmatic fossil species – Equus hydruntinus, the European wild ass.

The precise taxonomic affinities of this latter equid have yet to be satisfactorily resolved, for although genetic and morphological analyses suggest that it was very closely related to the onager E.hemionus, one of several species of Asiatic wild ass, it can apparently be differentiated from these and also from African wild asses by way of its distinctive molars and its relatively short nares (nasal passages). Arising during the mid-Pleistocene epoch, approximately 300,000 years Before Present, the European wild ass persisted into the early Holocene before finally becoming extinct. During the late Pleistocene, its zoogeographical distribution in western Eurasia stretched from Iran in the Middle East into much Europe, reaching as far north as Germany, and it was particularly abundant along the Mediterranean, with fossil remains having been recovered from Turkey, Sicily, Spain, Portugal, and France.

According to Nores and Liesau,moreover,this species may have survived in southernmost Spain and certain remote parts of Portugal until as late as the 16th Century (they consider its disappearance to represent the Iberian Peninsula`s last megafaunal extinction), where, they suggest,it became known locally as the zebro. More recently,their theory gained support from the discovery of E.Hydruntinus remains at Cerro de la Virgen,Granada, dating from as late as the 9th Century.

Some researchers have also suggested that before dying out,the zebro gave rise at least in part to a primitive, nowadays endangered Iberian breed of donkey-like domestic horse called the sorraia (which was once itself referred to as the zebro.)

Furthermore, many believe that it was from the term ` zebro` that ` zebra` originated as the almost universally-used common name for Africa`s familiar striped equids

Even today,many Iberian place-names still exist in which the mysterious but now-obscure zebro`s name is preserved. These include Ribeira do Zebro in Portugal; and Valdencebro (in Teruel), Cebreros (Avila,) Encebras (Alicante), (Murcia) in Spain.

FURTHER READING:

NORES,Carlos & LIESAU,Corina (1992). La zoologia historica como complemento de la arquezoologia. El caso del zebro. Archaeofauna,vol. 1, pp. 61-71

A ZEBRA-DRAWN CARRIAGE

by Richard Muirhead

The image below, which was kindly provided by the Cheetham Library in Manchester, shows a zebra drawn carriage of the Mazawattee tea company.

According to Wikipedia: “The Mazawattee Tea Company was one of the most important and most advertised tea firms in England for around 50 years. Traditionally the origin of tea-drinking lies in China and the famous Tea Clipper ships raced across the seas to bring tea to London. In the eighteenth century, tea had become an important drink in Britain especially for the wealthy, but it was not until the 1850s (by which time tea plantations had been successfully established in India, especially in Assam, and in Ceylon) that a real expansion occurred. The Densham family were at the forefront of this period of growth. Originally from Plymouth, they moved to London and managed to amass a fortune from the business in quite a short time.

The Denshams later owned fine properties in both Purley and Croydon and one of the founder`s sons, Edward, became a well-known figure in Purley……..The death of John Boon Densham at the age of 72 at his home in Croydon in 1886 ended the first period of the firm`s growth. John Lane Densham was immediately made a partner and tackled the problem of the firm.

He decided to supply its tea in packets to retailers and in a different way by inventing a name for the firm. Being a great advocate of advertising, he reckoned that something quite unusual might be the answer and went to the Guildhall Library to get ideas. He came up with the idea of using the word "Mazathawattee, " perhaps based on the Hindi "Mazaa", which means " pleasure or fun" , and the Sinhalese "vatta", which means " a garden". This was shortened to "Mazawatte" and duly registered as a trade mark for retail sales in May 1887." (1)

The company effectively came to an end in 1953.

REFERENCE

1. Wikipedia – Mazawattee Tea Company
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mazawattee_Tea_Company

Two Notes on the Nandi Bear

by Richard Muirhead

Within the last few months I have found the two newspaper articles below which give interesting information about the Nandi Bear of East Africa. The first item is from `**The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser**` of 28th December 1927.`

Nandi "Bear" may be a
Giant Hyena.

Who will solve the mystery of the Nandi "bear", that strange beast of the East African veld which terrorised the natives and taken heavy toll of their stock and which devours its prey in a manner unlike that of any other animal? Asks the Morning Post. The Nandi "bear" has also taken human life, killing a child of the Karasai tribe and, since the tragedy, a number of people claim to have seen the animal.

The animal appears to bear a charmed life, for on every occasion when it has been sighted some unusual circumstance saved it from identification – and a Latin name. A rifle jammed, or the ammunition was finished, or an elephant was seen down stream.

Captain Ritchie, a noted big-game hunter and the Game Warden of Kenya Colony, believes in the Nandi "bear", and thinks it may be a giant hyena, though he admits " it may be different from anything we know". But why a giant hyena should have six digits, as the spoor of the Nandi "bear" suggests, he is at a loss to explain.

It is now clear that the perpetrator of a third series of hitherto unexplained crimes is a hyena of huge size. This beast, which recently killed twelve cattle near Tuso, does his work in a most unprofessional manner. In every case the carcase is found almost unscratched except for one shoulder, the near-by ribs and heart. The Kikuyu say that one of these redoubtable animals was killed at Tuso four years ago, that it was as big as a lion, and had ten spears through it before it died.

An expert who investigated the matter has no doubt that the animal is similar to the Strandwolf (Hyaena Brunnea) of South Africa, a specimen of which he obtained many years ago in the Kalahari, and which he describes as being very large, of a dark brown colour with darker spots and hair five inches long, hanging down the flanks.(1)

The second item below is exciting and suggests that there may somewhere be a pelt of the Nandi "bear" but the Natural History Museum in London couldn`t help me with solving the problem of its current location (see below.)

This report is from `**The Hong Kong Telegraph**` of 10th December 1936

Settler Shoots Beast of Legend.

White Settler Jesse R Coope, hunting in the Mau forest, 100 miles from here, has shot a huge lynx-like creature which local people here believe to be a Nandi bear. For more than 20 years natives and others have reported seeing a Nandi bear at rare intervals, but never has one been shot or caught before. The animal has achieved an almost legendary reputation.
Captain A.T.A. Ritchie, the Kenya game warden, says the shot beast resembles an outsize lynx but possesses significant points of difference. It has dark mahogany coloured fur. Local experts say they have never seen anything like it before.
The skin and skull are being sent to the British Museum for examination and possible identification. (2)

So on December 3rd 2010 I wrote to the Natural History Museum in London quoting the Hong Kong Telegraph report above and received the following reply later the same day:

Dear Mr Muirhead,

Thank you for your enquiry. Unfortunately I have not been able to find any mention of a J R Cooper or Nandi Bear in our Museum Archives.This does not necessarily disprove that it was sent here for identification-we have log books recording acquisitions,outgoing loans,and specimen swaps,but we do not have a consistent log of every specimen which was examined by our staff.

I have forwarded your email on to our mammals department in case they have any further information, but I`m afraid at present it appears we have drawn a blank on this.

If you have any further questions, please let me know.

Thanks,

Daisy.(3)

On December 6th I replied:

Dear Daisy

Thanks for your reply but the name was J R Coope, not Cooper, would that make any difference? Also a Captain A.T.A. Ritchie, a game warden in Kenya was involved.

Does your mammals department have access to your store room and could the skin have been moved during the War?

Yours sincerely, Richard Muirhead (4)

To which Daisy answered:

Apologies for my mistake, although I`m afraid the name Coope has not thrown any greater light on your query, and we don`t have anything for A.T.A. Ritchie either.

Just to clarify on your storage query, we here in the Archives are only responsible for managing the paper records of our acquisitions and our institution, it is the Mammals Department who actually manage the specimens themselves. They do not have access to our store room, but our store room would not have been where the specimen would have been stored if we had had it.

Some specimens we held were temporarily moved to other storage during the Second World War. It`s hard to say whether this would have been one of them until we`ve ascertained whether we held it, and if so when.

Thanks,

Daisy (5)

On December 7th I persisted:

Thanks Daisy, is there any way you can pursue this further? Also, does anyone in your Mammals department know any experts on Kenyan fauna, particularly of the Mau Forest? (6) Daisy replied on the same day:

As I mentioned, I have forwarded your enquiry to the Mammals Department for them to follow up, they may take a little time to research into your request, but if we don`t hear back from them when they`ve had sufficient time to do some digging, then I am happy to follow up with them again.

I have forwarded your enquiry regarding Kenyan fauna to our Botany Library, they should be in touch with you presently.

Thanks

Daisy (7)

This was the last I heard about the missing Nandi Bear skin and pelt. If anyone can provide Flying Snake with definite evidence of its fate or current whereabouts, please contact me and you will receive the next 7 issues of Flying Snake free and a complimentary copy of the ground breaking album Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo! . First come, first served!

REFERENCES

1. The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser 28th December 1927
2. The Hong Kong Telegraph 10th December 1936
3. E-mail from Daisy to Richard Muirhead December 3rd 2010
4. E-mail from R.Muirhaed to Daisy December 3rd 2010
5. E-mail from Daisy to R.Muirhead December 7th 2010
6. E-mail from R.Muirhead to Daiisy December 7th 2010
7. E-mail from Daisy to R.Muirhead December 7th 2010

The Director and Management of the CFZ wish everyone at *The Flying Snake* success with their new venture

The Centre for Fortean Zoology, Myrtle Cottage, Woolfardisworthy, Bideford, North Devon EX39 5QR

Telephone 01237 431413 Fax+44 (0)7006-074-925
eMail jon@eclipse.co.uk
www.cfz.org.uk

Notes & Queries

Richard Freeman would like to know: Have there been any sightings of the Flying Snake of Namibia in the last 20-30 years?

Richard Muirhead replies: I typed in Flying Snake of Namibia into Google Books and came up with a reference to the South West Africa Annual of 1980. On pages 129-139 there is an essay by L.O.Honeyborne titled The Flying Snake. Honeyborne was a police sergeant in Keetmanshoop, Namibia, close to where a flying snake was seen in 1942.

Richard Muirhead would like to know: There is a mention in the manuscript of `**The Inns of Salisbury**` by R.G. Gordon of animal that was either a hyena or a "camel". The text of the manuscript describes the visit of a visit of a man to an inn called the Maidenhead in Salisbury. He wrote, on September 28th 1767:

The stupendous Hyena is a perfect Phenomenon: this astonishing animal can exist many days without either solids or fluids, and the latter more than 20, though in the most sultry climates, weighs upwards of 30 cwt, and is about 20 hands high" (? Camel.) – which " intends visiting this city", but does not seem to have done so.

I wrote to the late Clinton Keeling to ask his opinion as to the nature of this animal and on May 18th 1996 he replied:

" I was most intrigued by the strange "Hyena" of 1767, and am inclined to agree with you it sounds uncommonly like a Camel. In fact, Camels were not unknown in the country to date, as c.1610 several had been presented ex Spain, to King James 1; it`s more than possible, though, that none had been seen in the country since and people had simply forgotten what they looked like. On the other hand, there was then plenty of trade with North Africa, Turkey, India, etc., where they would have been seen by many Englishmen. The mystery deepens when it`s borne in mind that Hyenas, almost from the word "go", were common in travelling shows, and certainly the Striped species was exhibited at the Tower menagerie in the 18th Century. "

Can anyone else throw light on this matter?

The November 2009 a letter from David Green appeared in **BBC Wildlife Magazine**, page 111, as follows:

HERE BE WALLABIES

"Elisabeth Wallace`s lovely story about a red-necked wallaby on the loose in Devon (Tales from the bush,September) brought back memories of my father,who used to see a group of pure white wallabies, as well as normal coloured ones, on the Derbyshire moors before World War II. I remember seeing them myself in the 50s, as a child of 10, but unfortunately I never spotted the white individuals. "

David Green
Derbyshire

Richard Muirhead would like to know: Has anyone any more information about these white wallabies? "**Richard Muirhead** would also like to know: Does anyone know of any cryptids in Cuba?

Dr Devo about 2 years old.

Copyright The Editor

Book Reviews

In the Beginning was the End Oscar Kiss Maerth

This extraordinary and worryingly eccentric or subversive book, depending upon your point or view, or degree of sanity/insanity, is concerned with, as the blurb on the back cover puts it:

" A Shattering New Theory of Evolution! This startling bestseller poses a devastating new theory of evolution that explodes the accepted that explodes the accepted concepts of Darwin! It claims that Man evolved through the cannibalistic practices of primeval apes! That intelligence can be eaten. That the cannibalism of his ancestors still preys upon the conscience of Man and has caused him to lose his innate powers of extra-sensory perceptions!"

It has been said that Oscar Kiss Maerth is a pun on Oscar Kiss My Ass. Well this piece of anthropology may have impressed Devo around the mid to late 1970s, but around 35 years later it fails to move me although I am a Devo fan. For example to quote from chapter 8,

" Genesis is an intuitive description of the beginnings of life on earth, notably of the abnormal development of a hairy animal into man; who by eating the fruit of knowledge, has become naked, sexually disordered and intelligent. As a result of this unnaturally acquired intelligence mental disorder developed and with it man`s delusions, burdening him with the diseased concept of work and progress" (p. 203)

Now it may seem a minor point but the tree in Eden was a tree of *the knowledge of good and evil* not simply knowledge. There is nothing wrong with knowledge, the case was that Adam and Eve were not ready for knowledge at that moment in time. This knowledge brought about spiritual death, which is probably one of the ways cannibalism came into the world in the first place.

Maerth says:

" One ape discovered that eating the fresh brain of one`s own kind increases the sexual impulses. He and his descendants became addicted to brains and hunted for them. It was not until later that they noticed that their intelligence increased as a result. The outcome of this process is HOMO SAPIENS (p. 37)

It is hard to know what to make of a book like this. It is daft. Dangerous even. However it is also a brave attempt to challenge evolutionary thinking and religious dogma. Let Devo have the last words:

" The beginning was the end, of everything now, the ape regards his tail, stuck on it! Repeats until he fails, half a goon and half a god…." (Devo - Gates of Steel)

Moa Sightings Bruce Spittle Dunedin New Zealand: Paua Press Ltd 2010
Vol 1 (ISBN 978-0-473-15356-4) 2 (978-0-473-15357-1) 3 (978-0-473-15358-8)

I knew next to nothing about the evidence for the survival of the moa in New Zealand from c. 1150 (chapter 110) up to the (in?) famous 1993 Craigieburn Forest Park sighting (chapter 151.) However, I am now able to thoroughly recommend Bruce Spittle`s three volume ` Moa Sightings` .But book a six month holiday on some remote unexplored island to fully absorb this thoroughly researched body of work. This is not a book for casual reading but a serious reference source.

The caption on the back cover of each volume explains:

" Hunting pressure, habitat destruction, and introduced predators led to moa extinction by A.D 1650 according to the previously held serialoverkill model. In the currently accepted rapid "blitzkrieg" model, all the moas were gone by A.D. 1450, over 300 years before the first Europeans landed with Captain Cook in 1769. However, a number of moa sighting claims have been made since 1769 and the author offers for consideration a staggered survival model in which moas lingered on until a later date in some remote, isolated areas. The available circumstantial evidence for a few moas remaining after 1769 is presented including reports suggesting survival in circa 1810 by Kawana Paipai, 1845 by Burr Osborn, 1863 by Patrick Caples, circa 1825-1875 by HJ Cuttance, and 1878 by Sir George Grey.
The author, Bruce Spittle, is of part-Maori descent and lives in Dunedin, New Zealand.

The volumes are divided into chapters giving name(s) of the witnessing and the " claimed time and place" for the moa being alive. Taking volume 1 chapter 3 as an example:

John Boultbee 1826, Milford Haven (Milford Sound)
Introduction, The Claim.
Discussion.

The chapter is well illustrated with a map and photos, as are all the chapters of the volumes. Each volume is comprehensively indexed. One criticism I do have is that perhaps the chapters could have been arranged chronologically. However at NZ$70 a volume with free shipping these are expensive but very worthwhile.

Letters to Flying Snake

There have been no letters as yet to Flying Snake,because only a handful of people know it exists,so I thought I`d include a few letters I`ve received over the last 20 years or so which I hope you might find of interest. This first one was from Dr Anthony Bogadek then of St.Louis School,Hong Kong,dated 2nd March, 1997, joint author of Hong Kong Amphibians and Reptiles 2nd edition with Stephen J.Karsen and Michael Wai-neng Lau which was published in 1998.

Dear Dr (sic!) Muirhead

Thank you for your letter of 18-2-97.The way you spelt my name (Bovidec)would suggest that I belong to the family Bovidae! Don`t worry!It`s quite OK with me.People have mispelled and mispronounced by(sic) Slav name hundreds of times.Its great fun for me.

I am afraid I have no answers for any of your intriguing questions.

Your first question is a little puzzling.You are asking whether there are any snakes in Hong Kong “at present unknown to science.” What might or might not be present here, no-one can tell until time as the species is discovered. In recent years, we have made a few new records of Hong Kong snakes, but these species are not new to science. They occur in nearby Guangdong Province.They include *Amphiesma boulengari* and *Rhabdophis nuchalis.* The only local reptile species,known to be new to science, are *Dibamus bogadeki* , afossorial lizard discovered a few years ago,and Hemiphyllodactylus sp., a new gecko species still unamed and under investigation.In our forthcoming second edition of “Hong Kong Amphibians and Reptiles”, updated and very much expanded, there will be a short chapter on the history of herpetology in Hong Kong and a list of some 20 herp species of possible occurrence in Hong Kong.

Snakes reported from Hong Kong once before “but never seen again” include *Cylindrophis ruffus,* a specimen of which is now in the Museum of Natural History (Vienna,Austria); *Chrysopelea ornate*(its whereabouts are unknown) and *Dendrelaphis pictus.* A Dendrelaphis specimen was caught after a gap of 90 years at Shek Kwu Chau, a small island south of Hong Kong.On the same island were found two specimens of *Ahaetulla prasina,* a new record for Hong Kong.However, no one can tell whether these four species are part of our native fauna or were introduced into Hong Kong by the food and pet trade and later released,or whether they are escapees from captivity.

There have been past reports of elephants living in the wild in southern China (see pamphlet by A.A Fauvel on “The Alligator in China”, published privately by the North-China Branch Royal Asiatic Societ Shanghai (1879).Whether elephants as well as other species mentioned by Fauvel ever strayed into Hong Kong is as good a guess as any.

I am not aware of any accounts, Chinese or otherwise , specifically on the natural history of Hong Kong. I would be happy to have the information should you ever come across any sources during the course of your work. And,finally,no one of my acquaintances knows what has happened to the museum collection that you refer to. I was very interested in tracking it down because Chrysopelea was in that collection. Because we could not locate it, and in the absence of further evidence, we were compelled to discount this snake as a valid member of our Hong Kong snake fauna.

I am sorry that I have not been very helpful. You may find Er-mi Zhao and Kraig Adler`s “ Herpetology of China”, published by the Society of Ambhibians and Reptiles (SSAR); ISBN: 0-916984-28-1, a useful source of herpetological references.

With my best wishes for the success of your research and my best personal regards.

Sincerely yours

Anthony Bogadek

In January 1998 I corresponded with the late Clinton Keeling on the subject of melanism in animals:

16th January 1998

Dear Richard,

Greetings.....Regarding melanistic Squirrels, when this sort of situation occurs in an isolated or localised area (and it need not necessarily concern colour;for example,it`s exactly the same with,say,the Black Rhinoceroses in one part of Kenya which have no external ears)it`s usually because a particularly dominant male or fertile female has been carrying what might be termed “baddie” genes. The same applies to the black wild Rabbits of Anglesey and the Water Voles of Norfolk. For what its worth,though, one observation of my own is that very frequently, although by no means invariably,animals in districts where the soil is acid are often darker than their counterparts where it`s more alkaline or limey.

Where albino Squirrels are concerned, I know of no British populations or concentrations, BUT the Red is far more likely to throw such individuals that the Grey-in fact when the former was commoner than is now the case most of the white ones seen were of that species. Why,though,Isn`t immediately clear.

Hope this is of some use to you.

Kind regards,Clinton

A missionary in the Republic of Congo Congo (as it then was) replied to a query of mine in June 1995:

6-6-95

Dear Richard

I am a missionary with United World Mission doing church planting work with the Aka in the Republic of Congo.My family and I arrived back on the field in Jan.1995.We will be here for 4 years.UWM

I personally believe that there may have been an unknown animal in our inundated forests, but it may now be extinct.One of my colleagues,Gene Thomas,strongly believes that it exists. You can reach him at BP 24 Brazzaville Republic of Congo Phone & FAX 00-242-82-33-07

The testimony of the Aka and the Bantu villagers is not conclusive. They can tell you about the dinosaur, but they can also tell you about men who live in the water and gorillas who talk and write letters. The only way to separate scientific fact from legend is if someone got some hard evidene.

The 80`s were the heyday of the Mokele Mbembe expeditions. Each one that went to Lac Tele “saw it” but they weren`t able to get it on film.In the early 90`s large scale scientific expeditions using underwater photography found nothing(The Japanese filmed a TV show of an expedition.They left a big debt with the villagers so I pity the next expedition to Lac Telle) There is a lot of wildlife research going on in the Congo so maybe someone will see the thing. Who knows when God might choose to reveal His secrets.

And now to that hero of modern British Socialism, Ken Livingstone MP for Brent East (1987-2001) as he then was. As one of the extremely small band of Macclesfield socialists, I present to you,comrades, Ken Livingstone on the Eft!

22 April 1996

Dear Richard Muirhead

Thank you for your letter of 15 April about the terms eft

Or evvet. They were just other names for newts - not crocodiles or anything else.

Yours sincerely

Ken Livingstone.

Wikipedia Creative Commons

The following letter is included in honour of my late father Stuart W.Muirhead (1931-1993) as it includes some items of interest from Hong Kong,which is where he nurtured my interest in zoology. The letter is from Ho Shai Lai, a former General in the Kuomintang, who fled China after the Communists took power in 1949.

April 18,1996

Dear Richard,

Thank you for your letter of March 27,1996.I have sent a copy of your letter to my sister,Irene.Her address is: Dr.Irene Cheng, 4730 Noyes St., # 311,San Diego, CA 92109 U.S.A.

Although she is well over her 90`s I am sure she will be delighted to answer your questions. Regrettably I have not read her book on my mother,Lady Clara, as I am not a good reader. Furthermore I do not have much memories of 50 Peak Road,Mount Kellett, as I only stayed there for about five years before my father sent me down to Idlewild in care of my other mother, Lady Margaret.She had no children and since I was a “problem child”, she had more time to train and encouraging me to live a respectable life. At the Peak, Lady Clara had nine children. Anyhow the following may be of some help in answering your questions:

1. I remember the huge tortoise very definitely. I used to stand on it and it and it would move around without any problem. Its back shell had a diameter of about 10 inches. It was brown with black spots or black stripes.To the best of my memory, I have never seen a tortoise of that size.Where it came from, I do not know.With the completion of a temple which Lady Clara had built in Happy Valley in the 1930`s the tortoise was moved over there. It lived at the Tung Lin Kwok Yuen,(the temple) for many more happy years after the end of the Japanese war.

2. There was some wildlife around our house at Mount Kellett. Among them were many poisonous cobra and bamboo snakes. There were also a few pythons which came to steal our chickens. One night a very long python, about 12 feet long was caught on our tennis court. I believe my father presented it to the Hong Kong Museum where it was placed on exhibition for many years. Since I have not been to the new museum, I do not know whether the python is still on exhibition.

3. There were also a number of "fruit foxes" that ate up the fruits on the trees and the vegetables from the garden. One night we engaged a caterer to serve dinner for a family party, and he noticed a "fruit fox" perched on a tree in the garden. He tried to catch the fox but the fox bit him so badly that he could not serve the dinner. Our dogs always tried to kill these foxes. They succeeded

In doing so once or twice a year but nowadays the Peak is so heavily inhabited and I haven`t seen a live "fruit fox" for many years, except the remains of one that was killed by our shepherd dog two years ago. This is all the information I can furnish you as I said I only stayed on the Peak for about five years.It was not until 1961 that I moved back with my family.

Your father visited us soon after we moved to 75 Peak Road. If you or your mother come to the Far East and if we still live at 75 Peak Road, you will be most welcome.

Your father gave us a lot of good advice and took care of my father`s estate.We deeply appreciated it. As I was a military man when my father died we did not know how to manage the estate. We still run it according to most of the advices of your father and so far we seem to be getting along fine. My children and my family remember him with respect. He provided genuine beyond that of a normal trustee. I went to his memorial service as I wanted to show my respect and appreciation....

Yours sincerely,

Ho Shai Lai

weird weekend 2011

Speakers include:

Trevor Beer, Raheel Mughal
John Hanson/Dawn Holloway/
Glen Vaudrey, Paul Vella
Max Blake/Dr Darren Naish
Henry Hartley, Nick Wadham
Richard Freeman et al,
Jeremy Harte, Ronan Coghlan
Neil Arnold..

Plus exotic insects from Bugfest, a full programme of events for kids, films, music, workshops, stalls, food and drink, and lots more stuff to be announced.

£20
in advance for weekend.
Children under 16 free

Now in our 12th Year, this is an event like no other. Three days of high strangeness in the middle of the beautiful Devon countryside

THE COMMUNITY CENTRE, WOOLFARDISWORTHY, NORTH DEVON, UK 13th-15th August 2010
www.cfz.org.uk TEL: +44 (0) 1237 431413

WWW.WEIRDWEEKEND.ORG
Sponsored by UFO Matrix

AN **ORANGE-COLOURED BADGER** IN MATLOCK , DERBYSHIRE UK, 2005

This photograph was taken at the One World Festival in New Mills, Derbyshire on July 3rd 2010.

The badger was found dead by the side of the road in Matlock, Derbyshire, 2005.

SPOTTED CAT from The Master of Game - A Fifteenth Century book in the Bodleian Library Oxford (MS Bodley 546 fol 40 verso). See Pages 44-45 of Flying Snake 1.